

A Facebook For Industry

Facebook, manufacturing, industry, social, media, people, interact

Facebook has transformed how many of us use the Internet. It's a great tool to help people easily keep in touch with friends and family, share pictures and video, and play games. Let's face it, it's the single largest collective of people ever in the history of mankind, and it's changed how we interact socially. When you add the fact that there are one billion users, and almost 70 percent of its access is mobile, the impact broadens tremendously.

The genius is how the back end systems dynamically adapt to real-time situations, with historical intelligence through a simple interface. That's how it has been elevated beyond just a social network, to become a platform for real-time, social intelligence.

Having worked in the industrial automation space over the course of my career, I can only imagine the impact this type of real-time, social intelligence can have on the roles of plant managers, supervisors and operators, if data from their machines and processes is fed to their mobile devices and smartphones. Let's say you're a part of an operations crew for a water utility, you're at home, and your iPad prompts you about a problem at a pumping station (similar to how you are tagged by Facebook when a friend posts a new photo). You have the ability to use a mobile application to learn more about the situation remotely. You're only five miles from that station, so you can quickly determine if you need drive there to fix the issue before the equipment fails. The right decision, made in seconds, based on contextual intelligence, can save the utility from costly repair, while ensuring customers get water without any interruption. It's mobility + data + analytics.

Now imagine the holistic value when this same concept is applied to the estimated 500+ million industrial workers on the planet. More and more, IT and engineering departments, which make up industrial automation, are adopting smartphones and tablets to streamline operations, versus just being luxury items for executives and sales teams. As such, a new industrial software market has emerged called Real-time Operational Intelligence (RtOI).

Many believe that RtOI can easily drive 10% improvement in efficiency. But let's be conservative and consider that if it improves the industrial workforce's efficiency by just 1%, saving each worker five minutes in an eight hour shift, it pays for itself within months and the rest is all upside.

If an Industrial social network platform saved five minutes out of a worker's day, where the data automatically comes from the machines versus being extracted by the operators, the bottom line impact is significant. If workers could log into a system via a mobile app with a simple user interface, fed by an intelligent back-end - that would not only unlock them from a stationary terminal, but they'd have contextual information (relevant to them and their role) - anytime, anywhere. This

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enables workers to make better decisions and take quicker action in a realm where, traditionally, systems simply pushed raw data to user interfaces designed for stationary use. This is a paradigm shift.

The real challenge industry faces when it comes to embracing this new paradigm, is to make it simple to use, and make the intelligence behind it transparent to the user, much like social networking platforms. This is no small task for the vast amounts of data in an industry that dwarfs Facebook.

If one single industrial machine shared data into an Industrial social networking platform, it would take less than one hour to share what an average user on Facebook shares per year. To put this into context, when this data is extrapolated from just four manufacturing facilities that have an average of 1,000 machines each, the same amount of machine produced data elements would equal what's shared by 845 million users on Facebook in a year. Bringing this up a level, if only 1% of machines within the estimated 30,000 manufacturing sites around the globe were connected and actively sharing data elements - collectively the sum of those Industrial Facebook's would be 7500x the volume that Facebook handles today.

Many in industrials have both small and big data products that are collecting all of this data. However, with the growth of smart devices, this has pushed them to explore how to use this data in a mobile fashion. New commercial off-the-shelf innovations have merged industrial standards with popular consumer software technologies. With the back-end system merging all of the existing data and transforming it into more actionable information, using simple logic and advanced analytics, it enables access to information in the appropriate context. As a result, operators can instantly visualize situations and collaborate on decisions via industrial level applications on devices like iPads and iPhones.

Real-time operational intelligence is real and it will drive a paradigm shift in the industrial sector. As I've talked to many peers and customers about this concept over the last year, it's clear that a Facebook for industry is coming - with mobility serving as the catalyst.

About the Author

Kyle believes that we're on the cusp of an industrial mobile revolution. As a member of the Global Product Management team at GE, Kyle focuses on mobile real-time operational intelligence (RtOI) solutions that enable all levels of the industrial workforce to be connected anywhere with the right information at the right time. Follow Kyle @ryzner

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